



March 2005

Higher Education Coordinating Board: Promoting Student Success Through Greater Accountability

What is the problem?

The Higher Education Coordinating Board's (HECB) *2004 Strategic Master Plan for Higher Education* sets two goals for higher education in the state: (1) increase opportunities for students to earn degrees; and (2) respond to the state's economic needs. As stated in the plan: "It is no longer enough to attend college. Students must succeed – and graduate." The master plan goes on to define aggressive targets for degree completion.

The current accountability framework for the public baccalaureate institutions has been in place since 1997 and does not allow the HECB to adequately assess progress toward state goals. Washington's current accountability system has been criticized for not focusing the state's attention on the right measures. The National Collaborative for Postsecondary Education Policy, in its recent policy audit of Washington State, reported that "accountability is not systematically used to help focus institutional attention on a limited number of state priorities." To meet the master plan goals, the state needs to implement accountability measures that focus on outcomes.

Although student learning is an important outcome for higher education, the updated accountability framework focuses on degrees rather than on student learning. The reason for this is that degree attainment has traditionally served as a proxy for measuring student learning, particularly for well-established, accredited institutions. In addition, all states struggle with measuring student learning, as evidenced in The National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education's *Measuring Up 2004* state report cards, which gave all but a few states failing grades for this measure. Quality is another outcome that is assumed for the institutions in our state when students complete their degrees. While not a primary focus of indicators in the new accountability framework, some of the recommendations specific to individual institutions focus on quality.

Washington ranks highly in terms of student degree completion when compared to other states. A total of 63.2 percent of first-time, full-time freshmen beginning their studies in fall 1997 had graduated with a bachelor's degree within six years (by summer 2003) in Washington. The

highest ranked state, Maryland, reported only a slightly better result, with 63.8 percent of its freshmen graduating within six years.¹

In 1993, 11.57 percent of 17-22 year olds were enrolled (or “participating”) at a public baccalaureate institution; in 2003, this rate had slightly decreased, with 11.34 percent enrolled.² Participation rates are a key factor in increasing the number of students who earn degrees. It is important to recognize that participation rates are not a factor for which public baccalaureate institutions should be held accountable since they are largely beyond institutional control and are dependent on state funding. The goal for accountability in Washington, then, should be for the institutions to maintain their high rates of achievement, while we continue to push for the state’s support of increased participation.

What is the HECB being asked to do?

At its March 2005 meeting, the board is being asked to consider a new framework for accountability reporting that meets the requirements of House Bill 3103, passed in 2004, which required the HECB to establish an accountability system (Appendix A includes an excerpt from HB 3103 describing the HECB’s role in accountability). The new accountability framework includes revised indicators for the public baccalaureate institutions that are linked to master plan goals. The board will be asked to adopt the new framework at a future meeting.

What is the new accountability framework?

Since March 2004, a workgroup comprised of representatives appointed by the provosts of the public baccalaureate institutions has been meeting regularly to design a new higher education accountability system. Representatives from the private institutions were also invited. Representatives from the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges (SBCTC) were consulted throughout the process and attended some meetings. (See Appendix B for a list of workgroup members.)

The result is a framework that meets the goals of the statewide *2004 Strategic Master Plan for Higher Education*, as well as the requirements of HB 3103. It shares many common indicators with those used by other states, facilitating future comparisons. Specifically, the workgroup recommended a system to include four main components: (1) a context section, to include indicators that describe student flow through the K-12 and community college systems; (2) common indicators focusing on student outcomes; (3) institution-specific indicators describing each institution’s unique contribution to state goals; and (4) a new timeline that ties accountability reporting to the biennial budget cycle.

¹ The National Information Center for Higher Education Policymaking and Analysis, www.higheredinfo.org, Completion: Graduation Rates.

² The Office of Financial Management, “2004 Washington State Higher Education Trends and Highlights: Enrollment and Population,” <http://www.ofm.wa.gov/hied/highlights/section1.pdf>

1. **Context:** This section will include indicators that explain the condition of higher education in the state, as well as the unique mission and student demographics at each institution. This information will help policymakers understand some of the key factors that influence degree production in the state. For example, if students are not graduating from high school, then the public baccalaureate institutions will produce fewer baccalaureate degrees. Data reported will include:

- State funding/student FTE
- Percentage of state funds allocated to higher education
- Financial aid/student FTE (or another measure of affordability – such as percentage of family income needed to pay for college)
- Percentage of 9th graders who graduate from high school
- College participation rates
- Average WASL scores for 10th graders
- Number of students participating in dual-credit programs (e.g., Running Start)
- Percentage of recent high school graduates requiring remedial education
- Proportion of new students from Washington State community colleges (will be reported separately for each institution under institution-specific context indicators)
- Percentage of students earning bachelor's degrees who have earned at least 40 credits from one or more Washington State community colleges
- Enrollment by race, ethnicity, average age, gender, and last school attended at each institution

2. **Common indicators for the public baccalaureate institutions:** The workgroup has discussed seven indicators to be reported by all of the public baccalaureate institutions using the same methodology. All of the common indicators reported for the baccalaureate institutions will focus on outcomes, specifically on academic degrees awarded. Two of the indicators focus specifically on Washington community college transfer students.

Proposed indicator	What will this indicator tell us?
Number of degrees awarded by type (e.g., bachelor's, master's)	Progress toward master plan targets
Number of bachelor's degrees awarded in "high demand" areas specified by the HECB	How well the state is filling needs in high demand areas
Degrees awarded/enrolled FTEs	How many FTEs are required, on average, to produce a degree
Six-year graduation rate (first-time, full-time freshmen): comparable nationally	Are Washington students entering public baccalaureate institutions as freshmen graduating at the same rate as entering freshmen in other states?
Three-year graduation rate (Washington community college transfer students with a transfer associate degree): since many transfer students attend part-time, the percentage of students who have not graduated but are still enrolled and persisting toward their degree will also be reported	Are community college transfer students who enter a baccalaureate institution with an associate degree able to graduate, on average, within a reasonable amount of time?
Graduation efficiency: credits required for degree/credits attempted for two groups: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Non-transfer (less than 40 credits from another institution) - Transfer (40 credits or more from one or more community colleges) 	Are students completing more credits than they need toward their degrees? Is there a difference between non-transfer and transfer students?

Common indicators for the community and technical college system: The State Board for Community and Technical Colleges reports accountability data and sets targets for the community and technical college system, with HECB approval. The accountability measures for the two-year college system include measures tied to their multiple missions of workforce training, academic transfer, and adult basic education. Three basic measures capture the performance of the two-year college system:

Indicator	What will this indicator tell us?
Students prepared for work	How many students have completed their vocational program or earned at least 45 vocational-level college credits with a GPA of 2.0?
Basic skills gains	How many students have gained at least one competency level in at least one subject during the year?
Students prepared for transfer	How many students have completed 45 academic credits with a GPA of 2.0, including completion of core requirements typically completed by freshmen at a baccalaureate institution?

The SBCTC recently revised their definition of “students prepared for transfer” to better reflect the state’s interest in academically preparing students for their major at a baccalaureate institution prior to transfer, rather than simply assuming a student is prepared based on the number of credits they have earned.

SBCTC asserts that the indicators selected for the community and technical colleges reflect their role and mission, as directed in HB 3103. Furthermore, the measures are connected to state master plan goals. Readiness for work and basic skills gains are related to economic responsiveness, while transfer-readiness is related to increasing opportunities for students to earn bachelor’s degrees. SBCTC also provides the total number of degrees and certificates awarded in an annual report.

3. Institution-specific indicators: Each institution has suggested a new set of indicators unique to its campus. Representatives from each institution will be available at the March 2005 HECB meeting to discuss their proposed indicators. To date, indicators received include:

Eastern Washington University

- Increase student participation in field experiences and internships
- Increase percentage of degree programs that:
 - Identify and assess student learning outcomes
 - Collect, analyze, and use data for program improvement
- Increase targeted program access for placebound students through site-based cohorts and distance learning opportunities
- Increase diversity recruitment and retention of faculty and staff
- Improve retention/persistence rates for all classes:
 - Freshmen to sophomores
 - Sophomores to juniors
 - Juniors to seniors
 - Seniors to graduates
- Hours of student service to the community

The Evergreen State College

- Percentage of seniors who have done or plan to do community service or volunteer work prior to graduation
- Percentage of seniors who have done or plan to do practicum, internship, field experience, co-op experience, or clinical assignment prior to graduation
- Percentage of undergraduate degree recipients who earn more than 125 percent of the credits required for their degree
- The number of “upside-down” degree completions (tentative)

University of Washington

- Affordable Access
 - Graduation rates of underrepresented students
 - The percentage of undergraduates who are Pell-grant recipients
- Faculty Productivity
 - The number of programs ranked in the top 20 nationally
 - The number of national faculty and academic awards
- Economic Development
 - Total dollar value of direct research contracts/awards
 - The number of new technologies produced each year

Washington State University

- Pass rates on national licensure and professional exams
- Number of student experiences in research or other creative scholarship with faculty, internships, international study, and community service learning
- Percentage of degree programs documenting improvements in instruction and pedagogy based on assessment of outcomes
- Amount of extramural funding received for research and scholarship (in millions)
- Number of jobs directly and indirectly supported by research funding

Western Washington University

- Enrollment target for community college transfers
- Undergraduate tuition as a proportion of state average income and compared to benchmark institutions
- Students involved in research, scholarly, and creative activity
- Facilities utilization
- Average faculty salaries compared to benchmark institutions

4. Timeline tied to budget planning: Under the new framework, the SBCTC and the public baccalaureate institutions will report accountability plans in sync with the state’s budgeting cycle, as required by HB 3103. The overall framework will be evaluated every four years, with the development of the HECB strategic master plan. This will ensure that accountability is systematically linked to state goals.

Other Improvements

Baselines and Targets

Currently, the public baccalaureate institutions use a three-year average to calculate a baseline for each measure, from which targets are derived. This convention will continue to be used; but, where available, a baseline built on national data or data related to each institution's peer group will be developed. The target for each measure will meet or exceed the baseline. The two-year colleges base their targets on the funding they receive and will continue to use this method. Where possible, targets set by the *2004 Strategic Master Plan for Higher Education* will be used (e.g., for overall degree production).

The first new set of targets will be submitted to the HECB by the public baccalaureate institutions and SBCTC in November 2005 for the 2005-07 biennium, and will require board approval.

Peer Groups

Each public baccalaureate institution will continue to use its existing peer group list. The current peer groups follow the Carnegie Commission on Higher Education classifications and reflect institutions that are similar in terms of programs, size, students, and research orientation.

Washington Institution

The University of Washington

Peer Group List

25 institutions classified as "Research Universities, category 1 with medical schools"

Washington State University

23 institutions classified as "Research Universities, categories 1 and 2 with veterinary schools"

Central, Eastern, and Western Washington Universities

278 institutions classified as "Comprehensive Colleges and Universities, category 1"

The Evergreen State College

27 institutions classified as "Comprehensive Category 1 and Liberal Arts Category 2" (for salary comparisons, the peer group for the comprehensive institutions is used)

Community Colleges

All state community colleges systems in the country

The institutions have expressed interest in updating their peer groups, but this task is beyond the scope of the current accountability effort. HECB staff will work with the Council of Presidents, legislative staff, Office of Financial Management staff, and staff from the public baccalaureate institutions to discuss the best timing for updating peer lists in the future.

Communication

Results will be communicated using a format developed by the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS) – a Web site that includes not only performance for each indicator, but trends, information about how the measures can be used for policy decisions, and detailed information about how the measures are calculated.

Conclusion

The new accountability framework will help policymakers better understand the successes and challenges faced by the state and higher education institutions. It brings the HECB into compliance with House Bill 3103. The indicators have been revised so that they are nationally comparable where possible, and/or of interest to state legislators, as well as linked to master plan goals.

As the institutions begin reporting under the new system, it is vital that the data be used to influence policy, not just to explain why targets have been met (or not), with no further action or interest. For example, if graduation rates lag, or if transfer students begin reporting a substantially larger number of credits toward their degrees than do students entering as freshmen, the HECB needs to persist in asking why, and design appropriate policies to resolve any barriers that may be preventing students from succeeding.

The HECB has authority to adopt policies in many areas (e.g., state transfer policy, admissions policy, residency policy) and has the authority to develop an accountability system that highlights the effect of policy change, as well as suggests the need for new or revised policies. For example, if the HECB adopts its proposed minimum admission standards, the new accountability framework will allow policymakers to monitor the effect of that change on high school graduation rates and on the amount of remedial education provided to recent high school graduates.

Another example relates to state transfer policy. In October 2004, the HECB eliminated a state policy that required community college transfer students to complete a minimum of 90 (quarter-based) credits at the baccalaureate institution to which they transfer, effectively allowing community college transfer students to transfer more credits than they have ever been able to in the past. By monitoring a new performance indicator requiring institutions to report the number of credits completed toward a bachelor's degree by community college transfer students, the HECB can evaluate whether this policy change has made a positive difference in helping transfer students graduate more efficiently.

Finally, a new performance indicator requiring institutions to regularly report the number of degrees produced in "high demand" areas will help the HECB evaluate whether efforts to fund enrollment in these areas are resulting in an increased numbers of graduates.

Washington's accountability system will become much stronger as the HECB develops a "data warehouse" for the state, which is another master plan objective. When fully developed, the data warehouse will enable policymakers to better understand how different factors affect degrees produced and how earning a baccalaureate degree affects the state's economic responsiveness. HECB staff and staff from the Office of Financial Management and the Council of Presidents are currently working together to design the new data warehouse. OFM has volunteered to collect the data and plans to begin doing so by fall 2006.

Appendix A:

Excerpt from House Bill 3103, Section 11

- (1) The board shall establish an accountability monitoring and reporting system as part of a continuing effort to make meaningful and substantial progress towards the achievement of long-term performance goals in higher education.
- (2) Based on guidelines prepared by the board, each four-year institution and the state board for community and technical colleges shall submit a biennial plan to achieve measurable and specific improvements each academic year on statewide and institution-specific performance measures. Plans shall be submitted to the board along with the biennial budget requests from the institutions and the state board for community and technical colleges. Performance measures established for the community and technical colleges shall reflect the role and mission of the colleges.
- (3) The board shall approve biennial performance targets for each four-year institution and for the community and technical college system and shall review actual achievements annually. The state board for community and technical colleges shall set biennial performance targets for each college or district, where appropriate.
- (4) The board shall submit a report on progress towards the statewide goals, with recommendations for the ensuing biennium, to the fiscal and higher education committees of the legislature along with the board's biennial budget recommendations.
- (5) The board, in collaboration with the four-year institutions and the state board for community and technical colleges, shall periodically review and update the accountability monitoring and reporting system.

Appendix B: Workgroup Members

Public Baccalaureate Institutions

Central Washington University

Linda Beath, Associate Vice President for Undergraduate Studies

Mark Lundgren, Director of Institutional Research

Eastern Washington University

Theresa Martin, Director for Institutional Research, Demography, and Assessment

The Evergreen State College

Laura Coghlan, Interim Director for Institutional Research and Assessment

University of Washington

Kim Johnson-Bogart, Assistant Dean for Undergraduate Education

George Bridges, Dean and Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education

Fred Campbell, Dean Emeritus for Undergraduate Education

Phil Hoffman, Director for the Office of Institutional Studies

Washington State University

Cathy Fulkerson, Assistant Director for Institutional Research

Jane Sherman, Associate Vice Provost for Academic Affairs

Western Washington University

Kris Bulcroft, Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education

Sharon Schmidt, Assistant Director for Institutional Research

Joseph Trimble, Director for Assessment and Testing

Independent Baccalaureate Institutions

Seattle Pacific University

Cindy Price, Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs, Curriculum, and Assessment

Independent Colleges of Washington

Violet Boyer, President and Chief Executive Officer

State Board for Community and Technical Colleges

David Prince, Senior Manager for Research and Analysis

Doug Whittaker, Manager for Research and Analysis

Jan Yoshiwara, Director for Education Services

Council of Presidents

Cindy Morana, Associate Director

Higher Education Coordinating Board

Pat Castaldo, Associate Director for Information Services

Nina Oman, Associate Director for Policy

Holly Zanville, Senior Administrator/Chief Academic Officer